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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: BADUEL MAKES THE ROUNDS

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary. Former Defense Minister Raul Isaias Baduel continues to make public appearances in the wake of his support for the successful "No" campaign in the December 2007 constitutional referendum. He recently told PolCouns that he believes a change of leadership is needed in Venezuela to address pressing national issues and that a constitutional assembly is the best vehicle for moving forward. The formerly pro-Chavez political party Podemos is warily advising Baduel and may help him run for a governorship later this year. Baduel is widely perceived in local political circles as having presidential aspirations. End Summary.

12. (C) Former Defense Minister and retired General Raul Isaias Baduel appears to be making the rounds of public events to keep his face before the general public and to try to build support for himself as a possible presidential candidate. (Note: Baduel was Defense Minister until July 2007 and subsequently publicly opposed President Chavez's package of constitutional amendments.) Although the next presidential election is not scheduled until 2012, political actors, such as Podemos National Assembly Deputy Ricardo Guterrez, believe Baduel seeks a constitutional assembly as a means to convoke earlier presidential elections.

13. (C) Guterrez added that while Podemos is working with Baduel, the party does not support a constitutional assembly as it would likely be stacked with Chavez supporters and give him an opportunity to reintroduce many of the radical proposals contained in the recently failed constitutional referendum. (Note: Podemos is a generally pro-government party publicly committed to a socialist revolution, but opposed Chavez's failed constitutional reform package. End Note.) Guterrez also told PolCouns January 16 that Podemos does not believe that it is a good idea for "another military man" to succeed Chavez.

14. (C) PolCouns spoke briefly with Baduel at a recent reception in honor of the Venezuelan Association of Foreign Journalists (APEX). While deflecting questions about his personal political ambitions, Baduel said that the economic and political situation in Venezuela was extremely bad and growing worse daily. He said the government had failed to address basic problems such as crime and housing and that a change in leadership is needed. He added that unlike many who wanted to see Venezuela go over the precipice so that a political change could be made, he wanted to "apply the brakes" and avoid having Venezuela fall over the edge.

15. (C) Baduel repeatedly referred to his public stance

against Chavez's proposed constitutional amendments and emphasized his role in defeating them. This defeat, he said, created new opportunities to make political changes within Venezuela. Baduel spoke at length of the benefits of a constitutional assembly to put the government back on the right track. He reviewed the pluses and minuses of such a process and indicated that organizational steps could be taken (along with vigilance during the process) to minimize the danger that the assembly would become an anti-democratic vehicle.

¶6. (C) Interestingly, Baduel was accompanied at all times by Freddy Guzman, member of Podemos' national board. There is a widespread rumor in opposition circles that Podemos may support Baduel in the Aragua State gubernatorial race. Current Aragua Governor Didalco Bolivar of Podemos is ineligible to run for re-election due to term limits.

DUDDY